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September 18, 2020

The Honorable Terry Canales
Chair, Committee on Transportation
Texas House of Representatives
Texas Capitol, Room 4S.4
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: Interim Charge Three

Dear Chairman Canales:

I write on behalf of TechNet to help inform the House Committee on Transportation on Interim Charge Three, which asks the Committee to examine the technology and safety aspects of autonomous vehicles. TechNet is the national, bipartisan network of technology CEOs and senior executives that promotes the growth of the innovation economy by advocating a targeted policy agenda at the federal and 50-state level. TechNet's diverse membership includes dynamic American businesses ranging from startups to the most iconic companies on the planet and represents more than three million employees in the fields of information technology, e-commerce, clean energy, gig and sharing economy, venture capital, and finance.

Autonomous vehicle policy in Texas

The development of autonomous vehicles (AVs) will enable tremendous societal benefits by improving vehicle safety and access to transportation for disabled people, the elderly, and others who cannot currently drive themselves. Fully autonomous vehicles will improve safety by reducing the severity and frequency of automobile accidents and mitigate other inefficiencies of current motor vehicle use, such as congestion. TechNet supports policies that encourage the safe deployment of fully autonomous vehicles on public roads in the United States. These policies include the promotion of and investment in infrastructure and other architecture that will enable and accelerate AV operations.

Fortunately, Texas has a strong, positive legislative framework for AVs. Senate Bill 2205 (2017) established a unified, preemptive framework for autonomous vehicle testing and deployment in the state. The bill, which created Subchapter J in Chapter 545 of the Transportation Code, includes provisions related to compliance, insurance, accident reporting, and liability. This framework has successfully attracted numerous AV companies to test and deploy their technology in Texas, ranging from freight to unmanned aerial systems to passenger vehicles. Given this positive regulatory framework for AVs, TechNet would not recommend any amendments to the existing law.

Safety and traffic reliability

Interim Charge Three also requests policy recommendations to prepare for varying vehicle technologies to ensure safety and traffic reliability on Texas roadways. While not strictly necessary to encourage AV testing and deployment in Texas given the positive regulatory environment for AVs, there are certain infrastructure investments that Texas could make that can aid both AVs and human-driven vehicles. This would include highly reflective striping and uniformity in signage, lane markings, and traffic control devices. In general, keeping roads in a state of good repair will also improve safety for both human-driven vehicles and AVs – something that will benefit all Texans, regardless of how they get from point A to point B.

Infrastructure

There are numerous different technological approaches to AVs, and many will benefit from secure, reliable communications infrastructure to support the connectivity needs of autonomous driving. This includes a unified network and platform to support Internet of Things (IoT) devices and edge compute that will provide real-time data and direction to AVs. Additionally, an edge-to-edge network supporting the compute to create the “neural” network of data produced and leveraged by AVs would give Texas a further advantage as a leader in safe and reliable AV deployment.

TechNet appreciates the Committee on Transportation’s interest in AVs and looks forward to working with the Committee and its members this upcoming session and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Edmonson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Edmonson
Executive Director, Texas & Southeast